

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 13355

LIMDIS

E.O.11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR US VN FR
SUBJ: FRENCH PERCEPTIONS OF PHAM VAN DONG VISIT TO
FRANCE

REF: PARIS 12711

SUMMARY: FRENCH TO WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN TO DATE
CONSIDER THAT THE PHAM VAN DONG VISIT WAS USEFUL, BUT
THAT ONE SHOULD NOT EXAGGERATE THE PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE
OF THE VISIT. THE VISIT WAS A SUCCESS ON THE SYMBOLIC
LEVEL; THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS ON BILATERAL RELATIONS,
PRIMARILY ECONOMIC, WERE PARTIAL AND TENTATIVE; AND
POLITICAL EXCHANGES WERE USEFUL IF NOT A MEETING OF
MINDS. FRENCH SENTIMENTAL ENTHUSIASM WAS APPARENTLY
TEMPERED BY THE REALIZATION THAT THERE WAS NO CHANCE FOR
FRANCE TO RECAPTURE A PRIVILEGED POSITION SUCH AS IT
HAD HELD BEFORE. TOUGH VIETNAMESE BARGAINING AND THE
DISCOURAGING TRADE PROSPECTS WERE PROBABLY IMPORTANT
ELEMENTS IN SHAPING THE FRENCH REACTION. END SUMMARY.

1. QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR ASIA, DOPFFER, SAID
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THAT THE VISIT TO FRANCE OF THE VIETNAMESE PRIME
MINISTER, PHAM VAN DONG, SHOULD BE VIEWED FROM THREE
PERSPECTIVES: A) SYMBOLIC, B) BILATERAL RELATIONS,
AND C) GENERAL POLITICS.

A) SYMBOLIC: FOR 31 YEARS FRENCH RELATIONS WITH
VIETNAM HAVE BEEN STRAINED, AS THE LAST VISIT OF PHAM VAN

DONG IS 1946 WELL ILLUSTRATED. THE NEW VISIT UNDER CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES SYMBOLIZED THE CHANGE IN RELATIONSHIP. THE FRENCH GAVE EXCEPTIONAL TREATMENT AS THE RECEPTION AT THE MARIGNY PALACE (USUALLY RESERVED FOR CHIEFS OF STATE, NOT HEADS OF GOVERNMENT) ILLUSTRATED. DONG ALSO SAW GISCARD ON THREE SEPARATE OCCASIONS, AND GISCARD EVEN ATTENDED A LUNCHEON GIVEN BY DONG AT THE MARIGNY. IN ADDITION, PRIME MINISTER BARRE, DESPITE THE CONSIDERABLE DEMANDS ON HIS TIME FROM THE INTERNAL POLITICAL CRISIS SAW HIM SEVERAL TIMES, SHOWING GREAT CONSIDERATION FOR THE VIETNAMESE LEADER. (BARRE CALLED DONG A BLADE OF STEEL, LAME D'ACIER, A CHARACTERIZATION WHICH HAS SPREAD THE ROUNDS OF THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND HAS BEEN, IN GENERAL, CONSIDERED FLATTERING.) THE FRENCH PRESS GAVE VOLUMINOUS AND IN GENERAL FAVORABLE COVERAGE TO THE VISIT, AND THE VIETNAMESE PRESS (NHAN DAN EDITORIAL INCLUDED) WAS ALSO FAVORABLE. OVERALL THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT CONSIDERED THAT THE VISIT WAS A GREAT SUCCESS ON THE SYMBOLIC LEVEL.

B) BILATERAL RELATIONS: A NUMBER OF AGREEMENTS WERE ARRIVED AT TO MAKE IT LOOK AS THOUGH QUITE A BIT WAS ACCOMPLISHED:

(1) INDEMNIFICATION. AN UNDERSTANDING WAS REACHED FOR PRIVATE AGREEMENTS BETWEEN THE FRENCH BUSINESSMEN AND THE SRV TO SETTLE THE CLAIMS. THE GOF THOUGHT THAT THIS WOULD BE HANDLED VERY QUICKLY AND IN ONE YEAR THE WHOLE PROBLEM WOULD BE ELIMINATED.
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(2) AIR AND FINANCIAL AGREEMENTS. THE FINANCIAL AGREEMENT FOR 1977 IN EFFECT DOUBLED THE AMOUNT WHICH THE FRENCH PROVIDED IN 1975 FOR THE NORTH. AS BEFORE, THE PROTOCOL PROVIDES FOR MIXED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE CREDITS, LONG TERM, FAVORABLE TERMS FOR SUCH THINGS AS THE STEEL MILL, CEMENT FACTORY, SUGAR REFINERY, ETC.

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(3) PETROLEUM AGREEMENT. THE SRV SIGNED AN AGREEMENT WITH ELF-AQUITAINE SIX WEEKS AGO, BUT AN ANNOUNCEMENT WAS ADDED FOR THE VISIT. THE REAL CONTENTS OF THE AGREEMENT REMAIN TO BE NEGOTIATED. THE FRENCH PETROLEUM COMPANIES ARE EAGER TO ARRIVE AT AN AGREEMENT, BUT THEY ARE NOT PREPARED "TO LOSE THEIR SHIRTS."

(4) TWO CADRE AGREEMENTS. A "FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT" ON ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL MATTERS AND ANOTHER ON CULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL COOPERATION WERE ALSO SIGNED. THERE WAS LITTLE CONTENT AT THIS TIME, BUT THE AGREEMENTS DID PROVIDE FOR A MIXED COMMISSION ON THE MODEL OF THE SYSTEM PREFERRED BY EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. THERE WAS IN PARTICULAR VERY LITTLE THE FRENCH EXPECTED TO ACCOMPLISH IN CULTURAL COOPERATION.

C) POLITICAL ASPECT. DURING THE TALKS THE VIETNAMESE REPEATED THEIR USUAL PHRASES ABOUT DETENTE, REGIONAL COOPERATION. THEY REITERATED THAT VIETNAM HAD A PEACEFUL POLICY AND WAS DEVELOPING BETTER
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RELATIONS WITH THE SEA COUNTRIES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THAILAND. WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF REGIONAL COOPERATION, THE VIETNAMESE SAID THEY WILL REJOIN THE MEKONG COMMITTEE. THE SRV EXPECTED TO HAVE PROBLEMS WITH CAMBODIA OVER THE LEVEL OF WATER. THEY AGREED THAT GOOD FRANCO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE

STABILITY OF SEA. FRANCE EMPHASIZED THAT IT DESIRED TO COOPERATE WITH A PEACEFUL VIETNAM, AND SAID THAT IF IN TWO YEARS VIETNAM WAS NO LONGER PEACEFUL, FRANCE WOULD HAVE TO RESTUDY ITS POLICY. VIETNAM INSISTED ON ITS PEACEFUL INTENTIONS AND ITS EMPHASIS ON ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION, WHICH WOULD BE FURTHERED BY ACCELERATION OF ITS DEVELOPMENT OF GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE WEST.

2. FRENCH GIFT.

IN RESPONSE TO THE VIETNAMESE STATEMENTS ABOUT POOR HARVESTS AND A GRAIN SHORTFALL, THE GOF GAVE A GIFT OF 10,000 TONS OF WHEAT.

3. QUAI'S GENERAL IMPRESSION.

DOPFFER SAID THAT THE FRENCH CAME AWAY FROM THESE LATEST NEGOTIATIONS WITH A SOMEWHAT MORE SOBER VIEW OF THE VIETNAMESE. THE FRENCH STILL THINK THAT THEY CAN DEAL WITH THE VIETNAMESE, BUT ONE MUST BE VERY VIGILANT LEST ONE LOSE ONE'S SHIRT. THE VIETNAMESE WISH TO SQUEEZE OTHERS FOR EVERYTHING THEY CAN GET, WHETHER THEIR DEMANDS ARE JUSTIFIED OR NOT.

4. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION WITH A DIFFERENT EMBASSY OFFICER, A MEMBER OF THE ELYSEE STAFF SAID THAT GISCARD'S OBJECTIVE IN INVITING PHAM VAN DONG WAS, ON THE ONE HAND, TO AVOID REPEATING THE LONG ESTRANGEMENT WHICH CHARACTERIZED FRANCO/ALGERIAN RELATIONS FOLLOWING THE CONFIDENTIAL

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END OF THAT WAR AND ON THE OTHER HAND TO MAKE SURE THAT PHAM VAN DONG'S EXPECTATIONS OF FRENCH SUPPORT WOULD NOT BE TOO HIGH. HENCE THE FRENCH WARMTH COUPLED WITH POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC FIRMNESS. THE BALANCED FRENCH POLITICAL POSITION WAS ILLUSTRATED BY THE TOAST, WHICH

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GISCARD REWROTE HIMSELF, TO THE EFFECT THAT FRANCE WAS
INTERESTED IN FURTHERING ITS RELATIONS WITH VIETNAM,
BUT THAT IT ALSO HAD OTHER FRIENDS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.
THE FRENCH WERE SURE THAT PHAM VAN DONG GOT THE MESSAGE.

5. THE SAME ELYSEE SOURCE SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT AND
PRIME MINISTER WERE BOTH WELL BRIEFED ON VIETNAM AND
UNDERSTOOD THAT IN THE SHORT TERM VIETNAM HAS LITTLE TO
OFFER FRANCE. ALTHOUGH THE AID SUM LOOKS
IMPRESSIVE, MUCH OF THE AID IS TIED TO FRENCH GOODS AND
WILL RETURN TO FRANCE.

6. COMMENT. OVERALL THE FRENCH REACTION SEEMS TO BE
ONE OF SATISFACTION, BUT LESS THAN TOTAL ENTHUSIASM.
PERHAPS THE FRENCH ARE DOWNPLAYING THEIR REACTION IN
CONVERSATIONS WITH US BECAUSE THEY ARE AWARE OF THE
VIETNAMESE INTEREST IN RELATIONS WITH THE US AMONG OTHER
COUNTRIES AND OF THE LIMITED ROLE WHICH FRANCE WILL PLAY.
THE FRENCH WERE VERY MUCH IMPRESSED BY PHAM VAN DONG AS
A PERSON AND VICE FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN CO THACH
CONTINUED HIS PROCESS OF CHARMING THE FRENCH AND
CONVINCING THEM THAT HE IS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL OF THE
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VICE MINISTERS AND HAS A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH DONG.
GAMMON

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